



# USG Alumni Newsletter

## The 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Alumni Networking Conference

The 5th USG Alumni Networking Conference was held in Dushanbe Ismaili Center on November 28-29, 2014.

The event, initiated by a group of USG Alumni interested in strengthening and expanding the work of USG alumni in Tajikistan, brought over 100 former exchange participants together to discuss alumni actions and plans for youth empowerment. The activity helped the alumni to share the concepts explored during their exchange

program and after and to discuss a wide range of areas, including sports,

science, prevention of fundamentalism, human rights, entrepreneurship, information and communication technologies and journalism, to empower youth to be more active in the public life. It served as a platform for a greater interaction among alumni to find the ways to empower youth.

The conference aimed at the establishment, strengthening and expansion of contacts among the members of USG alumni community. It allowed the alumni get new information, share experiences and best practices, discuss current issues, and participate in the development of new projects. This is of interest not only for alumni of USG programs,

but also for their larger communities as it enables them to contribute to the development of a democratic society.

This year the conference was organized to enable alumni to get hands on practice conducting volunteer activities and community service. On November 29, 2014, USG alumni visited Hissor Orphanage for Children with Disabilities, Boarding School #1 in Dushanbe, and the office of NGO Good

Neighbors in order to take part in community service projects. It provided a unique opportunity for the participants to participate actively in discussion on issues and current situations important to youth and to come up with ideas and suggestions to meet new challenges and solve problems.



All conference participants were encouraged to offer their own versions of cooperation between members of the USG alumni community which will help to prepare and implement various joint activities in high levels. Alumni are looking forward to more active collaboration and community service in the near future.



## Democracy Grant Award: Engaging Rural Youth through Sports in Khorog

I would like to thank American Embassy on behalf of all the participants who took part in the Football and Basketball Competitions organized between October and November, 2014, in Khorog. This project was thanks to the Democracy Grant Award sponsored by the Department of States. Participants included eight boy and eight girl teams.

The goal of the project was to involve female players into sport and allow them compete with each other. The participants were recruited, trained for two days, and provided with uniforms. Trainers were on-hand to instruct the children in the rules of the game.

Students ranged in age and were from the 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> grades of the Presidential School. Before the competition they were introduced to the FLEX program. The presentation was held on September 19th in at the American Corner, where we introduced the students to the programs, and

announced the project.

Although many of them were very busy with their, the students committed themselves to participating in this project. The trainers were extremely helpful teaching the girls the rules of each sport.

I can still feel the happiness and joy of the players when they received their beautiful uniforms, I feel the heartbeat of the trainers distributing the outfits to the participants, their grateful feelings that are still in my heart, and “thank you” words in my ears. They were so happy that it brought tears to my eyes. Everyone was extremely grateful to the Embassy for this amazing opportunity.



*Caption 2 style is used to add picture captions. Captions are in text boxes for easy placement relative to images.*

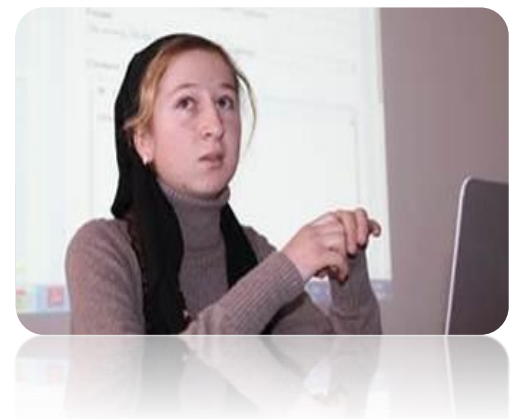
## Encouraging the Next Generation: Democracy Outreach Alumnus Mentors Future Journalists in Rasht Valley.

Eighteen students from six schools in Rasht Valley gathered at the American Corner in Gharm to learn the basics of journalism. Topics included ethics, principles, writing news and photo descriptions, photojournalism, photo editing and digital storytelling. The workshop was made possible through a Democracy Outreach Alumni Grant to iEARN Country Manager and IVLP alumnus Firuz Baratov.

iEARN is a non-profit global network that enables teachers and youth to use the internet and other technologies to collaborate on projects that enhance learning and make a difference in the world. Firuz Baratov built upon his own experience with the organization to conduct the Rasht Valley

training. Participants gained both theoretical and practical training in photojournalism and also had the opportunity to set up email and Facebook accounts in order to use social media platforms to share their work.

As a final project, the students prepared photo stories on the topic, “My Home, My Life and My Society”. The Deputy Chief of Mission from the U.S. Embassy, Robert Burgess, met with the students during the training to congratulate them on their work and to encourage them to be active participants in their communities. In the words of one participant, “We have started looking at our society from different viewpoint.”





# Leadership Trainings: Shining the Spotlight on Woman Leaders



Bonuvoni Fardo, a local NGO, held a one day workshop on leadership for women and girls from around the Shartuz District. A total of 125

participants took advantage of this unique opportunity through 8 training sessions. Aiming to build confidence in the participants, the focus of these workshops sought to increase awareness of women right's and encourage them to take up important roles in their communities.

The workshop included sessions on gender roles and stereotypes, methods of democratic leadership, and community involvement. Trainings used interactive

methods to involve the participants through brainstorming, group discussions, mini-lectures, and small group work. The participants gained invaluable professional development and, perhaps most importantly, the opportunity to network with fellow women leaders.

Sessions were held in the villages of Leninabad, Kizil Askar, Obshoron, and Lolazor in the Shartuz District. Bonuvoni Fardo is currently producing a twelve-minute documentary on the experiences of female participants in USG exchange programs.



# Building a Stronger Community through Service and Swimming:

Thanks to USG alumna, Takhmina Khojaeva, special-needs children had a unique opportunity to explore swimming and sports with athletes from the Taekwondo academy. The project's goals centered around building the self-confidence of these children and helping engage youth in community service. The project was a resounding success, and many of the children have signed up for future clubs!





# Promoting Healthy Minds in Healthy Bodies

Young men and women from school #3 in Vahdat enjoyed participating in the "Healthy Minds in Healthy Bodies", organized by USG Alumnus, Rono Kosamova. The students learned how to play basketball, tennis, volleyball, and chess. In order to encourage the participation of young women, the dressing room was remodeled to provide more privacy and sense of security. With this new area, girls will be able to fully join in the school's athletics.

On November 8th, a festival has held to celebrate the success of the "Healthy Minds in Healthy Bodies" program. Students were provided uniforms and received certificates at an awards ceremony.

